

EXHIBIT 7
DATE 2-16-15
HS 451

Walker Asserson
wasserson@bsd7.org
gmail.com

TESTIMONY - 2/16/15

Madame Chair, thank you for hearing us today. My name is Walker Asserson, I'm from Bozeman and I am the President of a non-profit, DREAM, Down syndrome Research Education and Advocacy in Montana. ~~Several of our board members are also here today. And this is my family.~~

An important question that must be answered about this bill is, "what would these students do with two extra years?"

In short, they would receive job training to enter the workforce and become taxpayers. But is this realistic?

In Bozeman we have a program that answers this question. It is called Project Search. It provides a clear example of how a little extra education can transform lives, create jobs, and add to the tax base.

DREAM and several non-profits and government agencies have come together to create Project Search. Right now, five young adults with disabilities are receiving job training at Bozeman Deaconess Hospital, our business partner. The interns rotate through six departments: rehabilitation services, human resources, the cancer center, sterile processing, the family birth center, birchwood dining room and programs, and hillcrest kitchen.

Two of the interns have Down syndrome, like my son, Henry, and many others here today.

I have compiled letters from several interns and hospital personnel.

PASS OUT PACKETS - Ask Madame Chair

I would like to quote from several letters. The director of human resources states, "We have witnessed dramatic growth in our interns in such areas as independence, social relationships, and self-confidence. They are eager to come to work and eager to learn."

The manager of business operations states, "My staff and I have been greatly impressed with [our interns] capabilities and work ethic and we are exploring how we might hire her..."

The manager of the family birth center says, "Project Search is worth every penny. I would be happy to hire either of the interns we have had this year."

Employment for young adults with disabilities is the new normal. Project Search has been replicated in over 200 cities for over 15 years. But our grant funding runs out in a year. In most states Project Search is part of the public school curriculum for students aged 20-21.

This bill, house bill 451, would allow Project Search, and other similar programs, to be implemented by public schools. Please pass this bill and create jobs, create taxpayers, and create dreams.

I know these are some important people and school boards concerned about funding. Well I have one thing to say, They figured it out in WY, ID, ND, SD and 48 total states

So don't tell me it can't be done,